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SUBJECT: NIGERIAN OPPOSITION PARTY TRIES TO REGAIN
RELEVANCE, BUT HOUSE-CLEANING REMAINS

REF: LAGOS 1849

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne per 1.4 (b) and (d)

This cable has been cleared by Embassy Abuja.

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: The crisis-ridden, Yoruba dominated Alliance for Democracy (AD) party selected former Osun State governor Bisi Akande as its new national chairman in a September 29 Lagos convention. Party faithful hoped the convention would reconcile rival factions, putting an end to an embarrassing public tussle over the party chairmanship. However, leaders of the Yoruba socio-political group, Afenifere (AD's political progenitors), denounced the convention, announcing it was severing all ties with the party. The Lagos State governor, Ahmed Tinubu, the lone AD governor, reportedly considered the convention a pricey necessity in order to bring the party back in compliance with Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) regulations. AD is reportedly casting for alliances outside of Yoruba land: courting VP Atiku (a close Tinubu friend) to join the party, should President Obasanjo not support him in his 2007 bid for the PDP nomination, as well as cozying up to aggrieved Delta groups. However, AD still has a lot of internal house-cleaning before it can form effective partnerships.
END SUMMARY

Background

[12.](#) (U) Once a significant player on the Nigerian political scene, AD lost five of the six southwestern gubernatorial seats in the flawed 2003 elections, emerging with only the Lagos State governorship. The party was further weakened by a power struggle between rival national chairmanship aspirants, Mojisola Akinfenwa and Bisi Akande, for the post of national chairman, which culminated in two separate conventions being held late 2003. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) voided both conventions and gave the party an October 31, 2004 deadline to resolve its internal crisis or organize yet another new convention. INEC threatened deregistration if the party failed to take either of these measures.

Internal AD Disputes Give PDP an "Easy Ride"

[13.](#) (SBU) Sola Iji, Ondo State chairman for the AD party met Polchief, Poloff, and Polspecialist on the eve of the September 29 convention. Iji said the public rift between Akinfenwa and Akande had damaged the party's ability to retain and attract members and to be a voice in national politics. AD party members are supporting other parties' presidential hopefuls, merely because they want to be on a winning team, Iji claimed. He commented that with AD consumed by internal crises, the governing People's Democratic Party (PDP) was having "an easy ride." Iji said his state was neutral as to who emerged as the new national chairman. The important thing was for the party to be reconciled and to return to compliance with INEC regulations.

Afenifere Elders Stuck in Ethnic-Based Politics

[14.](#) (SBU) Iji complained Afenifere, the pan-Yoruba socio-political group that authored AD, continued to hobble the party's efforts to expand its support base. Afenifere, he said, wanted to keep an iron grip on the party and pick its leaders. This alienated both younger and non-Yoruba party members. Iji remarked that the antagonists in the current crisis - Papa Adesanya, leader of Afenifere, Akinfenwa, and Adanke - are all septuagenarians. It's time to make room for new leadership, he concluded, vowing that that AD would do so, "with or without Afenifere."

Lagos Governor's Office Has Eye on 2007;

15. (C) Folorunsho Folarin-Coker, Deputy Chief of Staff to Lagos State Governor Ahmed Tinubu, told Polchief in a separate October 4 meeting that the governor viewed the convention as a "colossal waste of money." Nevertheless, it was necessary in order to bring the party back into INEC compliance. Folarin-Coker alleged the PDP was "pulling the strings" behind Afenifere in order to foment dissent within the party. The new convention, he said, would therefore yield no positive results, since PDP/Afenifere machinations would undoubtedly continue. Folarin-Coker also accused INEC of contributing to the AD crisis, saying, "the only thing independent about the commission is the "I" in its name."

16. (C) Asked how the party planned to extract itself from the crisis, Folarin-Coker replied, "money." "These conventions are meaningless. With money, we will regain our ward, legislative, and gubernatorial seats." Folarin-Coker said VP Atiku could provide the funds needed to restore party relevance, and in return AD could provide him a vehicle to run for the presidency, should he fail to win the PDP ticket. He maintained that Lagos Governor Tinubu and VP Atiku were "very close" and were actively discussing strategic partnership, should President Obasanjo fail to endorse Atiku in 2007.

Or We Can Ally With the Delta Groups

17. (C) Folarin-Coker averred that the governor's office and the AD party are also engaged in active discussions with aggrieved minority Delta groups. Pressed for how a largely South-West Yoruba party planned to attract these disparate groups, Folarin-Coker acknowledged the lack of "perfect ideological congruence." However, he insisted that as elections approached these groups might find the AD the "best suitable bedfellow."

Convention Atmospherics -- Music, Dance, and More Music;
Akande Wins while Afenifere Pouts

18. (U) PolSpecialist reported the convention had a festive atmosphere, as traditional musicians and singers ushered attendees into the stadium and delegates and guests sang and danced for hours. Prominent party members including former AD governors and legislators attended the event, as did representatives from several other political parties. The most important attendee, however, was the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), whose presence was seen as giving the stamp of approval to what party adherents hope will be the final, conclusive national convention.

19. (U) Approximately 4000 delegates voted to choose the party's national executives with former Osun State Governor Bisi Akande emerging as the party's new chairman. Leaders of the Akinfenwa faction did not attend the convention. Immediately after the convention, Afenifere leaders denounced the affair and reaffirmed their support for Akinfenwa as the party's "authentic leader." On October 5, Afenifere declared it was severing all ties with the party. (Comment: We may not have seen the last of the tattered Afenifere-AD alliance. Afenifere leader Adesanya is reportedly trying to sidle up to new AD chair Akande in hopes of keeping his relevance. End Comment.)

Comment

110. (C) This convention was stricken with the flaws of the prior two disputed conventions. The roster of delegates made the outcome pre-ordained. That many Afenifere leaders and Akinfenwa partisans boycotted the meeting is no big surprise. Few people are keen on attending an event at which their own public political demise is an integral part of the proceedings. That Afenifere is now publicly estranged from the AD demonstrates how far Afenifere has fallen in recent times. If it sold stock, one could buy Afenifere shares at distress values. The split also shows that the AD leadership is now independent of Afenifere and feels confident enough in its strength or in Afenifere's weakness to absorb the latter's wrath. The convention may have tapped Akande as the new AD chairman, but it confirmed Lagos Governor Tinubu as the real leader of the AD.

111. (C) Tinubu is a close political ally of VP Atiku, and there has never been much love lost between Tinubu and President Obasanjo. Tinubu will continue to people the AD leadership with people that look like him. He will also try to keep his opponents in Afenifere on their haunches by fomenting division within that group. In this vein he called

an Afenifere meeting on October 5 in which Senator Ayo Fasanmi was appointed Afenifere deputy chairman. Meanwhile, President Obasanjo and his cronies want to control the Southwest. They will continue to use Afenifere and disunity in the AD to weaken the party. The notion is plausible that VP Atiku may see the AD as an insurance policy should his bid in the PDP be unsuccessful. However, we think Atiku would be reticent to fund the AD knowing that such a move, if uncovered, would sink him in the PDP.

12. (C) With the withdrawal of Afenifere and possibly the Akinfenwa group, the AD may emerge from the convention as a less divided party. But it is also a smaller one, shorn of many of its founders and leading members. The new leadership, not so wedded to pan-Yoruba ideals, may be more willing to reach out to other groups. Ironically, because of the political split in Yorubaland, they will have less to offer these groups. In the final analysis, the AD is safe only in Lagos State. It will be hard pressed to gain meaningful allies among other groups in Southern Nigeria. Its best hope does not lie in what it can do for itself but in waiting for internal divisions within the PDP to send disgruntled PDP members its way. Until then, the PDP stands as the big winner in this latest Afenifere-AD flap because it will likely weaken the AD's appeal in Yorubaland.

BROWNE